

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 304 941

FL 017 931

AUTHOR Johnson, Lawrence
TITLE Teaching the Language of Business Culture.
PUB DATE Oct 88
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Conference on Language Teaching/Learning of the Japan Association of Language Teachers (14th, Port Island, Kobe, Japan, October 8-10, 1988).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Business Administration Education; *Business Communication; *Business English; *Educational Needs; English for Special Purposes; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; Idioms; Language Styles; Second Language Instruction; *Standard Spoken Usage; *Textbook Evaluation; Textbook Selection

ABSTRACT

Teachers of business English and business communication must carefully evaluate the business English phenomena presented in textbooks, especially American textbooks used in foreign countries. An analysis of American texts illustrates an approach to teaching basic speaking and writing skills through simple rules, unrealistic examples, and lessons devoid of either discourse or cultural context. What is needed are business communication texts based on empirical observations of real business communication that offer accurate structural and functional aspects of business English, and that present those phenomena most important to learners who need to communicate in the international climate and culture of business. A list of idioms found in business publications is appended, and a reference list of over 50 citations is included. (MSE)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

TEACHING THE LANGUAGE OF BUSINESS CULTURE

Lawrence Johnson

INTRODUCTION

Among the main goals of language teaching today we would certainly have to include the learner's understanding and use of it, or functional language comprehension.* Teaching a language effectively often requires tailoring instruction to the needs of the learner. And learners do need to comprehend the (relatively) accurate, appropriate and important usage and uses of a language in the world in which they will participate via communication, this being perhaps the main function of language.

In teaching ESL, one presents a description of the structures of English, shows how their functions vary according to constraints on social contexts, and emphasizes aspects of the language most important to the learner, e.g. stressing the asking and answering of questions while ignoring the spelling of seldom written words such as "serendipity" and "discombobulate." Likewise, one expects the methods and materials of EST to reflect attention to scientific/technical vocabulary and to discourse that typically occurs in, for example, engineers' social contexts.

And while we might naturally expect accuracy, appropriateness and importance to guide any language pedagogy, disappointment awaits one who examines the materials and texts of Business English (BE) and Business Communication (BC). For, as I hope to show, the twin blades of this communication instruction engine cut language into segments best characterized as uninformed, unrealistic and unimportant. I will claim that BE/BC must be changed greatly, to be empirically oriented (as called for over a decade ago by Nakamura 1975) if it is going to equip its audience to communicate satisfactorily or successfully in the world of commerce, the business culture. I suggest topics which should be included in a BC text, especially American texts which are widely used in much of Asia.

BACKGROUND

Typically American BE/BC textbook writers give advice, instruction and warnings which seem naive. For example, of the twenty BE/BC texts I examined, all warn against the use of jargon, as in 1:

* I am grateful to Melchor Tatlonghari for his comments and suggestions, which have improved the paper.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Johnson, L.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

* Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official
OERI position or policy.

- 1 The competent writer eliminates all jargon from written communication" VanAlstyne 1986: 7)
"The use of jargon is...a barrier to communication...a chattering, incoherent speech. The use of jargon should be discouraged(Ricks & Gow 1987: 6)... jargon is pompous, trite and abstract language (p. 32)

An objective definition of jargon is "a set of special vocabulary items used by members of the same profession" (Akmajian, Demers & Harnish 1984 :323). In fact, the jargon of accountants, bankers and stock brokers defines the lexicon of these business professionals. A glance at annual reports, business form letters, business magazines & journals, and prospectuses (a random collection of twenty of these sources were examined for this paper) reveals generous use of business jargon. (Also in abundant use are clichés, euphemisms, wordiness, likewise denegated by BE/BC text authors).

The first chapter of BE/BC texts often lays emphasis on the concept of "audience," since communication (quoted in 2),

- 2 boils down to being persuasive by aiming your message toward your audience's needs and desires. Your audience may very well be the most important ...for your success in business communication. (Munter 1987: 71) [and] Audience consideration is so important that it is discussed...(VanAlstyne 1987:4)

Looking through the twenty texts randomly gives the careful reader the impression that the "audience" is the authors' mid-American college student, with an imagined "big city business" situation. For example, Timm and Jones, co-authors of Business Communication, demonstrate how "poor communication can hurt our chances to get ahead;" They present a scenario in which Carol, a "Mayko department store manager" is looking to promote someone to assistant manager. Earl is a candidate, though sometimes he is "about as subtle as a dump truck," but Carol sees a copy of a letter Earl has sent to a good Mayo customer who questioned an unexpected charge on her bill. Following, in 3, is the supposed letter:

- 3 Dear Mrs VAn Dyke:
Mayko's resents the accusation you made on the phone about your billing. I checked out what you said and found that you did buy the item you disputed. I can prove it because I have your signature on the receipt. (1987: 4)

Such an exaggerated example is so unrealistic that a

reader could learn only some extremely obvious lesson, such as don't be antagonistic.

Despite some of the most recent texts' presentation of from a few paragraphs to a brief chapter (eg. Harcourt, Krizan & Merrrier 1987; Sigband & Bell 1986) concerning intercultural/international business communication, what we find are stereotypes, gross generalizations, and common sense advice, such as "When communicating with a Japanese, American business persons should be gracious and diplomatic" (Harcourt, Krizan & Merrier: 424). It may appear that BC text writers are aware of the world wide scope of business, warning that we "must cope with the problems of cross-cultural communication." (Sigband & Bell 1988: 68). Yet, there seems to be unawareness that these texts will be read/studied by non-native speakers(NNS) of English. At best, we see parochial statements, such as that in 4:

- 4 Classroom teachers, especially those at colleges and universities, should be mediators between students from other countries and their American students (Gootnick & Gootnick 1984: 463)

It appears that all business students in other countries must be studying in America. Do BE/BC text writers not know the world today has over one billion non-native English speakers (as estimated by David Crystal (1985)), with a great number in tertiary institutions studying for business degrees? Another question to ask here is why do we find such an uninformed (though uniform materials) approach in American BE/BC texts? Finally, is the concept of culture understood as no more than a few generalizations about 'other people in other places?'

Generally, business communication programs today have inherited a tradition from two origins. First is the vocational approach which typifies American secondary school business courses. Here we find training in short-hand, typing of letters, simple sentence grammar lessons (i.e. prescriptive teaching of punctuation, spelling, sentence length), and telephone answering skills. This can also be called secretarial training, with a feminine teaching force charged with the duty of office training of working class girls.

Second is the American MBA approach, symbolized by the Wharton School at Penn. and the Sloan School at MIT. This has become perhaps the most influential approach in many of the world's business schools. Thus, along with the popular "case book" approach there stands the well-known management communication theories of Sloan School-MIT Professor Douglas McGregor. McGregor was against the so-called "Theory X" management approach which considered workers lazy, undisciplined and afraid of

responsibility, while advocating "Theory Y," which viewed workers as intrinsically motivated, self-controlled and responsible. (McGregor 1961).

A statement of this attitude is given in 5:

- 5 Briefly, the theory of human communication advances the importance of such factors as social situation, role, status, rules and instruction in understanding social action and personal intent. (Ruetsch & Bateson 1957: 107)

Yet, current BE/BC texts condense these pragmatic factors, at best presenting them in exaggerated and unrealistic forms, and give expansive coverage to vocational/secretarial skill concerns.

In 6 is a portion of a stockholders address given by A W Clausen, Chairman and CEO of BankAmericaCorporation, at the Annual Meeting, May 29, 1988. I have underlined the clichés, abstractions, euphemisms, and wordiness examples specifically noted in a text by Figgins, Golen & Pearce (1984: 35-43).

- 6 Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for joining us.
Last year, I stood on this platform for more than three hours....in what was the longest annual meeting on record for this institution. I must confess [cliché] I look forward to our time together....
The Bank of America is well on the road to recovery [cliché].
This is what I pledged last year when I stood behind this lecturn [wordiness]:
We would clean up the loan portfolio [euphemism]
We would get costs under control
We would refocus our organization [euphemism]
We would reinvigorate our marketing activity [euphemism]
I am pleased to report to you [wordiness] that we have made significant progress [abstraction]

We've stopped the bleeding [cliché]. The patient is recovering [cliché].
But we still....our complete return [redundancy]

To see if these phrases are frequently used in business publications, I perused the following periodicals, listed in 7:

- 7 a International Business Week (Jan. 18, 1988)
 b Money (Dec. 1987)
 c Far Eastern Economic Review (Dec. 24, 1987)
 d Futures (v. 19. no. 5. Oct. 1987)

- e Sloan Management Review (v. 29. Fall 1987)
- f Journal of Marketing (v. 51. Jan. 1987)
- g Accountants Journal (v. 66. 8. Sept. 1987)
- h The Banker (v. 138. no. 743 Jan. 1988)
- i Singapore Business (v. 13. 2. Feb. 1988)
- j The Wall Street Journal (Aug. 4 1987)

A sample of phrases (more accurately, collocations) gleaned from the above is given in Appendix A. Now, we may judge clichés, euphemisms, redundancies to be "poor usage," but in their contexts, we find them in "use" and by authorities. The point is that we cannot teach students to avoid a common practice of the business culture. (Of course, euphemism, for example, is not limited to business discourse. Notice how euphemisms such as "third world" "working class," and "senior citizens" escape notice in use by the general population).

Business culture consists of those ideas, beliefs, and norms of behavior shared by identified members, or participants (as we would define any human culture). Concerns of business focus on money, goods, services, exchange, and organization. As one business text author puts it, "business is a social process involving the utilization of productive resources...capable of satisfying society's needs and wants" (Gitman & Daniels 1983: 7). In other (technical) terms, environmental and economic variables are variables causing cultural variability. As is true of any culture, communication of beliefs, attitudes via language is a key element accounting for their maintainance across the space and time dimensions.

Just what topics are considered an important part of BC? We can gain some idea from the following listing, taken from course offerings of a convenience sample of university business degree programs, in the areas of Accounting, Business, Finance and Management, given in 8:

- 8 Business Communication Theory
 - Practices and techniques essential to external and organizational communication
 - Interpersonal communication
 - Presenting oral and written reports.
 - Oral Communication in Business reporting
 - Management briefings,
 - Business reporting and interviewing;
 - Conference and committee leadership;
 - Communication in management environments
 - Communication through intrafirm publications
 - Research methods
 - Report and progress preparation
 - Models of communication
 - Integrated communication skills

And at the School of Accountancy, at NTI, among courses (for the B Acc degree) in accounting, statistics management, business law, information sciences, quantitative methods and economics, we find in 9:

9 A104 Business Communication, covering speaker skills, report writing, formal oral presentation, business writing, meetings, listening/feedback skills; interviewing skills

Another area of business study is Organizational Behavior. This course also gives attention to communication, especially as connected to decision making and information in organizations; the topic covers one chapter, out of fourteen, for example, in one of the commonly used texts (Gordon 1987),

Thus, it appears that communication as it operates in the areas of business writing, reporting, interpersonal communication, oral presentations and group communication occupies an important part of business education. And as mentioned, business communication programs exist in much of the world where NNS English is the businessman's lingua franca.

We must remain sensitive to a business communication terrain in which is firmly planted cost accounting, business statistics, quantitative methods, financial management, tax and business law, as well as equity investments. This is the business environment. That the global dimension must be included in our framework has often been publicized. Notice the excerpt in 10:

10 As for the Japanese threat, Peter Soloman, Vice-Chairman of Shearson Lehman [Hutton], declared that the only distinctive competence his firm possessed against the mighty Nomura Securities "is that we speak English" (Singapore Business Times Feb. 15. 1988: 3).

We thus conclude that much of the world's business is conducted in English, often a non-native variety, which means we must realistically attend to language factors.

BC TEXT CULTURE

Let us now look at what BC writers claim we should know about and be able to use of business communication by looking briefly at the contents of a BC text. The Business of Writing and Speaking: A Managerial Communication Manual (1984) is by Larry Robbins of the Wharton

School, University of Pennsylvania. In his introduction, Robbins points out the process quality of communication and notes the importance of hearer response and misinformation. Yet, his comments are figurative, such as "when the [communication] line is broken," or vague, such as, "interruption or 'noise' preventing clear communication."

Robbins points out that speakers must meet audience needs, and that "interpersonal communication occurs when an individual has direct interaction with every member of an audience." Under the sub-topic of "Tools of Communication," Robbins includes knowledge of basic grammar though he admits that "logic, syntax and grammar are not the only tools needed for clear communication." In addition there are "barriers" to communication (eg, "writer's block" and "stage fright").

Robbins' second chapter covers purpose, audience and preparation, including advice such as, "Remember too, when writing outside the United States, that most other cultures require formal distance and tone in correspondence." Chapter 3 concerns logic, organization and persuasion, valuable enough topics, though organization is presented mainly along the lines of sequential, categorical, and spatial, and logic is limited to inductive and deductive; no mention of propositional or predicate logics which today's computer literate business student is familiar with. Chapter 4 points out the necessity for revision.

Chapter 5 handles the Letter, 6 looks at Memorandums, 7 focuses on Reports, while 8 lists Proposals and 9 goes into Case Analysis. Chapter 10 handles "general Principles of Speaking," while 11 applies organization to speech topics; 12 focuses on Preparation and Rehearsal, 13 delves into techniques of delivery. Section four mentions specific tasks of speaking, group presentations, meetings, and interviewing. We end with the glossary of style and usage. While Robbins covers most of the areas usually considered the communication part of a business program, he does not address any but the most elementary student, reflects a naivete about business communication outside of Pennsylvania, and reprints a set of simplified normative grammar rules.

The recently published Business Communication: Strategy and Skill (1987) is by Mary Munter, Professor at the Amos Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College. Despite this author's claim to "teach students how to communicate in the changed business world," she covers the same topics and in a manner similar to Robbins. Munter intends to display strategy, rather than formulas, and claims an increase in space devoted to

electronic and international communication. Yet, paragraphs, businesslike sentences and words occupy a long three chapters. Also, an appendix devotes sixty-four pages to sentence grammar, word choice, punctuation and mechanics.

Aside from their ethnocentrism, naivete and narrowness, these books (including listings in the References) avoid relevant aspects of communication. Rather, these works stick to the narrow path of formats (letter, memorandum, report), prescriptive grammar (primarily sentence structure) and assorted advice, such as "smile at an interview." BC students need to learn how to negotiate meaning in conversation, recognize problems in discourse and accomplish the goals of business communication, "to get the response you desire from your audience" (Munter 1987:3).

RELEVANT BE/BC FACTORS

Let us now look briefly at how a good business communication text should attend to potential problems in the process of a Speaker/Writer (S) passing a Message (M) to to a Hearer/Reader (H). We thus focus on the importance of the discourse context, semantics, and the intentions-effects of talking/writing within the business culture. A basic question is, how does one person understand another by deducing what is said? This means that communication can be problematic; students need to understand just what problems arise in the process of communication. Notice the example in 11:

- 11 Spkr 1: Would you like to go to the meeting
 tonight?
 Spkr 2a: Yes, I would like to go to the meeting
 tonight
 b: Yes, I would
 c: I have to prepare some reports
 d: Tomorrow is the tripple witching hour

While 2a is a straightforward positive response to 1's question, it would not occur in a normal situation. 2b is a natural response, though it requires 1 to interpret it as a positive response, by understanding "would" as 'will go.' c is indirect speech (saying one thing, while meaning another), an utterance suggesting insufficient free time, thus a negative response interpreted by 1. d requires that 1 and 2 share applicable knowledge about 2's schedule, such that 1 can infer that d is a figurative utterance to be interpreted as a negative response. In uttering d, 2 assumes that 1 can and will infer d as intended.

A speaker's message needs to be grammatically and socially appropriate. The message may be 'direct' or 'indirect,' just as it may be 'literal' or 'nonliteral.' S's intention (in a business context) is to convince and motivate H. The success of communication depends upon S and H sharing sensitivity to the above factors, plus cooperative/politeness strategies of conversation (and written communication), and, of course, shared beliefs.

Shared beliefs explain why, for example, something that is logically true is, in the real world, as we believe it, false, as illustrated in 12:

- 12 In propositional logic: (p and q) ---> (q and p)
 a, He got drunk and stole the money (p and q)
 b, He stole the money and got drunk (q and p)

 c, He proposed to her and got married (p and q)
 d, He got married and proposed to her (q and p)

While in a, we could assume drunkenness was an excuse for stealing the money, in b, this assumption would not hold. In c, we accept proposal as a previous act before marriage, but in d, we don't believe proposing follows marriage.

As Nakamura (1981) pointed out, Japanese business students know, for example, that "quite" means 'completely,' 'altogether,' as in "I quite agree." Thus a sentence such as "Quite a few attended the meeting" is interpreted as "a very small number attended." Notice the difficulty a NNS could have with the following examples, given in 13:

- 13 a Could we meet for lunch today?
 b I've got a 12:30 meeting

 c The trader built the portfolio quickly
 d The trader was building the portfolio quickly

 e The ball was falling toward the table. He
 failed to catch it. It took us an hour to
 pick up the pieces

To understand b, one needs to know cultural constraints on lunch time and duration. In c, "quickly" modifies the description of an event, meaning 'at a faster than normal rate.' In d, "quickly" designates a process, meaning 'shorter than usual in duration. In e, we infer that the ball was breakable, and did break, from the result of the unseen 'brokenness' in the last sentence.

Another problem, in the area of semantics, arises due to the use of what are called "quantifiers," those words

signalling greater/lesser amounts. Notice how 14 is ambiguous:

- 14 Some of the accountants read all of the balance sheets

This could mean that the total number of balance sheets were read by some (of the total number) of the accountants, that is, some accountants read some balance sheets, some accountants read other balance sheets. This could also mean that some accountants read each and every balance sheet.

I have mentioned limitations in BE/BC textbooks that present doses of prescriptive grammar. How helpful is it to either NS or NNS of English, learning how to communicate in business situations, to be told that "nouns are words that indicate people, places or things," while "a clause is a group of related words that contains a subject and a verb" (Munter: 417-18). Tautologies such as "a fragment is not a sentence" and "a double sentence is two sentences stuck together incorrectly as if they were one sentence" (Munter: 427) are of dubious importance. Such definitions, plus the invented examples and mechanical exercises, reveal lack of familiarity with approaches to English grammar of the past thirty years. And certainly, structural and functional information on English has been widely enough presented over the last three decades.

Most problems in real human communication are, in fact, not due to ungrammatical sentences. To be sure, they may be socially stigmatized, but a deeper more difficult to see problem is due to pronominal reference (anaphora). Thus, pronouns require figuring out, when in the context of discourse, based upon shared assumptions, or socio-cultural knowledge, as in our example in 15:

- 15 The teacher saw the student. He returned his paper.

But notice that it is not by grammatical decision that H will know that "He" refers to the teacher and "his" refers to the student. That is why 16, below, could be ambiguous, depending on referent of "She":

- 16 The teacher stared at the woman. She turned away.

Coverage of pronouns in BE/BC textbooks is restricted to possessive and personal forms, nominative and objective case forms, and problems such as correct usage for who/whom, followed by advice such as "keep pronouns close to their antecedents" (Clark, Zimmer & Tinervia 19

88:169). Traditional grammar says NPs such as "everyone" take "he"(his,him) as the proper pronoun as in "Everyone lost his books." But notice, when we switch our attention from an isolated example we can find a segment of discourse, as in 17:

- 17 Everyone lost his books yesterday. I wonder if
 he found his books today?

In the second sentence, neither "he" nor "his" can refer to "everyone," in sentence one (that is, the scope of the quantifier does not cross sentence boundaries).

Many of the BE textbooks have a chapter on listening and speaking skills. In a McGraw-Hill text (Stewart & Zimmer 1986) the chapter on oral communication contains a section on enunciation and pronunciation, with a story about an error in pronunciation which caused a secretary to retype a letter. The example, given here as 18, is a fairly good sample of natural speaking, using "eye-rhyme" spelling.

- 18 Maria, you're gonna havta type this letter over.
 You made a terrible error that wudda cost us a
 lotta money

The authors point out that "havta" (naturally pronounced [hæ~æf tə]), should be pronounced HAVE TO, "wudda" (with a natural pronunciation [wʊdə]) should be pronounced WOULD HAVE and "lotta" [/lɒtə] should be LOT OF. To correct this supposed poor pronunciation/enunciation the BE authors advise, "move your jaw freely between an open and a closed position"(Stewart & Zimmer 1987: 500).

Not only are we presented with such transparently pretend-type dialogues, we are told to "be sure that you clearly pronounce word endings such as -ed, -ment, and -es"(Ricks & Gow:226). There is no mention of how one could achieve cohesion or coherence. Rather, we find that the goal of communication is "to convey a message that a receiver perceives exactly as the sender intends, with no difference in meaning" (Stewart & Zimmer: 4). This is, of course, impossible. Larsen-Freeman (1988) has called this approach "the distraction of contrived language" and pointed out that students need practice in activating knowledge of vocabulary, structures and functions...and need "practice in negotiating meaning" (1988:8).

Further, many BE/BC text writers are unaware just what characteristics appear in human speech. Thus we find caveats given in 19:

19

You should overcome any tendency to fragment your speech with meaningless uh's, like's and you know (Wells: 534) [and] But frequent pauses... are irritating and break the listener's concentration. The error becomes worse when the speaker fills in the pauses with uh's and meaningless you know and ok's (Lesikar: 600)

Human discourse, such as conversation, contains meaningful speech elements, words and phrases, tone or intonation and pauses, including discourse particles. These particles perform two general functions in conversation, establishing conversational relevance of undisclosed thinking, and marking real time moment of occurrence of that thinking (Shourup 1985). As mediators between thinking and talking, "well", "oh", "you know", "um," sometimes called interjections or fillers, are naturally occurring and meaningful. Notice the difference between a and b in 20:

20

- a I didn't make the phone call you asked me to
- b Oh, I didn't make the phone call you asked me to

In b, "Oh" indicates the following talk just entered the speaker's mind and implies S's failure to make the call was forgetful, not malevolent (Shourup: 21). These particles "abound in conversation ...speakers can display sensitivity to the importance of what is not expressed in an interaction" (Shourup: 156).

And as Lo Castro(1987) has recently documented in Japanese conversation, for example, along with head nodding, there are particles such as "heh," "hummm" and "ne," and expressions such as "so desu ne,"(Is that so?)"soo yo"(agreement) and "naruhodo,"(indeed) such that "the use of aizuchi represents a variable in the conversational routine typical of Japanese speaking people." Labelled 'continuer' signals, a brief sample is given in 21:

21

- A: Mukashi no hito iu jya nai?
- B: Um, so so so.
Demo, honto so o yo...
- C: Um, um.
- B: Yochien-no-toki, sugoku itagaru ko ga ite,
yappari...
- C: Um (LoCastro 1987: 109)

Aizuchi has also been documented and explained by Hinds (1978) and Schegloff (1982). The use of aizuchi is paralleled in Singaporean English with the particle "lah" as in, "You are cooking, lah", functioning as an emphasis

marker and a solidarity signal. (Kuan-Terry 1978).

There are two more areas that need to be covered in BE/BC texts, the principles of cooperation and politeness, and direct-non direct and literal-nonliteral expressions.

IMPORTANT CONVERSATION PRINCIPLES

First, there are the Politeness Principle (reciprocal between S and H) and the Cooperative Principle (which implies that an M is 1, relevant; 2, sincere; 3, truthful; 4, quantified (contains sufficient content) and 5, qualified (S has adequate evidence for his M)). Violation of either of these two principles is noticeable.

The politeness principle concerns a social relationship between speakers and explains why in the sentence pairs in 22, below, a is considered polite, while b is considered impolite:

- 22 1a Can you lend me your car?
 b You can lend me your car
- 2a You must come and have dinner with us
 b You may come and have dinner with us

The cooperative principle explains why some conversations don't progress very far if they follow the pattern shown below in 2's response to 1, given in 23:

- 23 Spkr 1: Did you catch the Dow?
 2: No
 1: It fell forty points in the second hour,
 and my Syntex is down to twenty-five.
 2: So what, is tea cheaper in China?

Let us look at some examples now of direct and indirect as well as literal and figurative expressions given in 24:

- 24 1. You're the boss
 2. It's getting late
 3. I'd never have guessed
 4. A fly wouldn't eat this food
 5. I would appreciate a cup of coffee
 6. I'd like to talk to Lee

1 is in the context of a response to a command which is not agreeable to H, who as S, responds with this M. Its interpretation is to the effect that S will comply with the command since the S of the command has the right and

authority to expect compliance. To paraphrase, 'All right, I'll carry out what you want.' Thus, indirect.

2 said in the context of a timed situation, such as a party, is indirect; that is, it not the time that is the intent here; rather the S intends H to understand that S wants to leave.

3 said about a factor obvious to S, indicates also a nonliteral intent.

4 said in the appropriate context, here a plate of food extremely disliked by S, is likewise nonliteral.

5 is nonliteral given that the intent of S is a request for a cup of coffee.

6 is also nonliteral, since S (according to one interpretation) wants and will talk to "Lee"; thus "like" is figurative here.

An expression by S is literal if S means what he says, but nonliteral if S performs one intended act by another. As for direct speech acts, let us look at a few examples in 25:

- 25 1 The students are about to arrive
 2 I'm sure the boss would love to have another
 delinquent account on the books

Now, if in 1 above, the M is interpreted (as intended) as a report about the arrival of students, then the M is a direct (and literal) act. If, however, 1 is a warning that H should prepare for the arrival of the students, then it is an indirect (though literal) act. 2 above is direct though nonliteral, since the E does not mean (we assume) delinquent accounts are wanted on the books. We can categorize nonliteral expressions into three groups, Understatements ("Not bad"), Overstatements ("No one understands me") and Metaphors ("Saloman has had its sails trimmed" meaning financial losses and staff layoffs have reduced the prestige of the investment house).

Similarly, there are indirect speech acts, which succeed as communication (achieve S's communicative effect) since despite their obvious semantic reference to one "meaning" actually point to another interpretation. The following examples should clarify this concept, in 26:

- 26 a. "The door is over there" (meaning to H, 'you may/should leave')
 b. "I should not have changed the figures" (meaning 'I apologize')
 c. "Did you bring a copy of the report" (spoken by S

COMMUNICATION IN CROSS-CULTURAL CONTEXTS

As pointed out above, business communication occurs more and more frequently in non-native speaker contexts. While BE/BC texts advocate standard English usage, this ignores the fact that business communication is a world wide phenomena. And as one applied linguist (Kachru 1984) has documented the claim, it is so often not Standard British or Standard American English that is socially acceptable in Asia today; rather it is the regional varieties.

Conversations occur cross-culturally and internationally and involve participants and consist of strategies. These include openings, turn-takings, topic-choosings, and closings. Yet conversation is usually hidden behind the unempirical concept of interpersonal communication, or "communication in a face-to-face situation" in current BC texts (e.g. Bittner 1985).

Now, while interpersonal communication is a universal characteristic of human groups, there are culturally specific rules of conversation, just as certain grammatical rules are specific to a particular language or dialect. Despite the spread of the English language, the world's most widespread lingua franca, as well as the language of technology, science and (much) business education, BC text writers (as noted above) have relegated cross-cultural/international communication to a few pages, an appendix or a brief chapter (with gross generalizations, eg. Timm and Jones 1987, Sigbond and Bell 1986, Harcourt, Krizon and Merrier 1987).

Perhaps, if business were a local or national concern, an international context would be a specialized matter. However, the cliché, 'Wall Street sneezes and the world's markets catch cold' reveals that the global dimension of business has been repeatedly demonstrated. The front page story about the US-Japan trade imbalance, the fashion pages showing Japanese fashion, in clothes, cars and cameras, the financial pages' attention to the Tokyo market and the Nikkei Index, and the ads of Honda hiring workers in Louisiana hide not the facts of international business.

Popular books on business capture wide readership with Japan Inc. Three chapters of Mark Zimmerman's How to do Business with the Japanese deal with business language communication. He gives many examples of how the Japanese approach business differently from Americans, showing how crucial it is to know the verbal and non-

verbal behavior habits of Japanese businessmen. And this is but one of many books on business in/with Japan, not to mention the NICs (Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korean and Singapore) and Thailand. Articles on intercultural communication have appeared in the Harvard Business Review and in publications of the University of Michigan International Business Studies (eg. Hildebrandt 1981), as well as books on the subject by popular anthropologist Edward Hall.

Due to the necessity of doing business by talking and writing, there naturally arise misunderstandings and other problems in multi-lingual and cross-cultural contexts. Thus, there must be recognition of factors of cross-cultural communication; but BE/BC texts reveal a lack of awareness of conversation principles, of the type mentioned. Note, for example, the communication problem in 27:

27 SCENE; telephone

Spkr 1: Hello, is Mr Goh there?
Spkr 2: Yes
1: Ah...can I speak to him, please
2: Yes
1: Oh, you're Mr Goh?
2: Yes

The problem here is not that 1, Mr Goh, must "say 'Hello' courteously and identify yourself, your department", as advised by the author of Professional and Technical Writing Strategies (VanAlstyne 1987:363). Speaker 2 should know that in some countries, as in Singapore, phone answerers do not identify themselves. A culturally aware routine must be learned, not the advice given in 28, from a BE text:

28

Talk directly into the mouthpiece.
Talk slowly and naturally. Exaggerate you enunciation. Shouting is never necessary.
If, while talking, you must put down the receiver, place it on a book or magazine rather than drop it on a hard surface. (Stewart & Zimmer 1984:509)

Thus, communication strategies must be learned, based upon accurate description of communicative situations that are realistically presented.

As Larry Smith has pointed out, what BC learners need to recognize is "such things as the place of silence, appropriate topics of conversation, forms of address, and expressions of speech acts (e.g. apologies,

requests, agreement, etc.)...which are more important than grammar."(1988: 9)

Particular communication strategies in cross-cultural contexts, such as approximation, paraphrasing, topic avoidance, circumlocution, mime and repetition, have been presented by ESL scholars (e.g. Tarone & Yule 1988). Much has likewise been published on conversation breakdown repairs (e.g. Tarone 1977; Coulthard 1977), and on various aspects of pragmatics (e.g. Leech 1984; Levinson 1983).

CONCLUSION

Let me conclude with some remarks by Mikito Nakamura, of Kwansei Gakuin University, given in a paper at the American Business Communication Association over a decade ago. I quote him in 29:

29

Unfortunately, Business English has been left underdeveloped for various reasons; first,... Business English has required students to concentrate their efforts on the technique of practical letter writing alone. Second, in

Britain and the United States where the study of Business English is most highly developed, the discussion is primarily practical, with little literature handling the subject as a science.

The science of Business English is a science of Business English phenomena. Business English phenomena are empirical facts that can be experienced... The science of Business English, therefore, is an act of knowing Business English phenomena systematically. (1981: 69)

It is thus imperative that teachers of Business English and Business Communication view with outmost caution the business English phenomena presented in BE/BC textbooks. American texts display an approach to teaching basic speaking and writing skills via simple rules and unrealistic examples and lessons, devoid of context, discourse or cultural. What is desperately needed are BC texts based on empirical observations of BC, which offer accurate structural and functional aspects of BE, and select those phenomena most important to learners who will need to communicate successfully in the international climate of the culture of business.

APPENDIX A

Selected list of collocations (idioms) in business pub-

lications:

the bad news	blue chips	we were snookered
band aids and	trade hawks	guinea pigs
chewing gum		
pump priming	back on track	sweetening the
		deal
get a handle on	a silver spoon	ruffled his
	in his mouth	feathers
sitting pretty	cookie-cutter	rocketing prices
	formula	
cotton-picking	bull market	paper losses
(genius)		
safe and sound	full-blown	bail out (of the
(annuity)		(market)
ballooning rates	junk bonds	the only game in
		town
can't get a handle	it fiddles	a grain of truth
on (the spread)	(its accounts)	
quick bucks	toothless tiger	putting on a
to add salt to the	the jury is	throw caution to
the wound	still out	wind
in-house (problem)	remain on the	shifting onto
	sidelines	the other foot
fleet of foot	on the run	blazing a trail
how much can you	goes belly-up	make your head
stomach		swim
money talks	pull the plug	loose purse

REFERENCES

I Business Publications

- A Practical Guide to Investment in Japanese Securities. The Nikko Securities Co., Ltd. 1987.
- BankAmerica Corporation. Annual Meeting of Shareholders 1988.
- The Banker. v. 138 no. 743. Jan. 1988.
- Elco Industries, Inc. Annual Report 1987.
- Far Eastern Economic Review. 24 Dec. 1987.
- Financial News Network Inc. Annual Report 1987.
- Futures (Journal of Forecasting and Planning) v. 19 no. 5. Oct. 1987.
- Home Shopping Network, Inc. Annual Report 1987.
- International Business Week. 18 Jan. 1988.
- Journal of Marketing. v. 66 no. 6. Sept. 1987.
- Management International Review. v. 27 no. 2 1987.
- Microsemi Corporation. Annual Report 1987.
- Money. Dec. 1987.
- Singapore Business Times. 15 Feb. 1988
- Sloan Management Review. v. 29 no. 1 Fall 1987.
- USAA Investment Trust. Prospectus 1988.

Singapore Business v. 13 no. 2. Feb. 1988
The Wall Street Journal Aug. 4 1987
Harvard Business Review v. 65 no. 2 Mar-Apr 1987

II Books and Articles

- Abrams, K S. 1986. *Communication at Work*. Singapore: Simon & Schuster Asia Pte Ltd.
- Akmajian, A Demers, R A & Harnish, R M. 1984. *Linguistics: An Introduction to Language and Communication*. (2nd Ed) Boston: MIT Press.
- Bach, K and Harnish, R M. 1979. *Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Bittner, J R. 1985. *Fundamentals of Communication*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Clark, L R, Zimmer, K and Tinervia, J. 1988. *Business English and Communication*. (7th Ed) Singapore: McGraw Hill International.
- Coulthard, M. 1977. *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis*. London: Longman.
- Crystal, D. 1985. "How Many Millions? The Statistics of English Today." *English Today* 1.1.
- Figgins, R Golen, S P & Pearce, C G. 1984. *Business Communication Basics*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Gootnick, D E and Gootnick, M. 1984. *The Standard Handbook of Business Communication*. New York: Free Press.
- Gordon, J R. 1987. *A Diagnostic Approach to Organizational Behavior*. (2nd. ed.) Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Harcourt, J, Krizan, A and Merrier, P. 1987. *Business Communication*. Ohio: South-Western Publishing Co.
- Hildebrandt, H. (ed.) 1981. *International Business Communication*. Michigan: University of Michigan.
- Himstreet, W C & Baty, W M. 1987. *Business Communication Principles and Methods*. (8th Ed) New York: Kent Pubs.
- Hinds, J. 1978. "Conversational Structure: On Investigation based on Japanese Interview Discourse." In Hinds & Howard (eds.):79-121.
- Kachru, B. 1984. "Regional Norms for English" In Savignon & Berns (eds.)
- Kantorowitz, T D and Ott, C R. 1984. *Effective Writing for the Business World*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co.
- Kuan-Terry, A. 1978. "The Meaning and Source of the Lah and What Particles in Singapore English." *RELJ Journal* 9 (2): 23-36.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. 1987. "From Unity to Diversity: Twenty Years of Language Teaching Methodology." *Forum* 25 (4):2-10.
- Leech, E N. 1983. *Principles of Pragmatics*. London: Longman.
- Levinson, S C. 1983. *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Lesikar, F V. 1985. *Basic Business Communication*. (3rd Ed) Illinois: Richard D Irwin Inc.
- LoCastro, V. 1987. "Aizuchu: A Japanese Conversational

- Routine." In Smith (ed):101-13.
- Munter, M. 1987. Business Communicaiton: Strategy and Skill. London: Prentice-Hall International.
- Nakamura, M F. 1981. "Business English and Business Communication in Japan." In Hildebrandt (ed):67-82.
- Pearce, C G, Figgins, R and Golen, S P. 1984. Principles of Business Communication. Singapore:John Wiley.
- Ricks, B R & Gow, K F. 1987. Business Communication: Systems and Applications. New York: John Wiley.
- Robbins, L M. 1985. The Business of Writing and Speaking. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.
- Savignon, S J. 1987. "What's What in Communicative Language Teaching." Forum 25. 1: 16-21.
- Schegloff, E A. 1982. "Discourse as Interactional Achievement." In Tannen (ed.): 71-93.
- Seekings, D. 1987. "Effective Writing." EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION. Management Decision. Day, A (ed.) v. 25 no. 3: 11-15.
- Sigband, N B and Bell, A H. 1986. Communication for Management and Business. (4th Ed.) New York: Scott, Foresman and Co.
- Swindle, R E & Swindle, E M. 1985. The Business Communicator. (2nd Ed) Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Tarone, E & Yule, G. 1987. "Communication Strategies in East-West Interaction." In Smith (ed.):49-55.
- Timm, P R and Jones, C G. 1987. Business Communication. (2nd Ed.) NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- VanAlstyne, J S. 1987. Professional and Technical Writing Strategies. London: Prentice-Hall International.
- Wells, W. 1988. Communications in Business. (5th Ed). Boston: PWS Kent Publishing.
- Zimmerman, M. 1985. How to do Business With the Japanese. New York: Random House.

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Conference on Language/Learning of the Japan Association of Language Teachers (14th, Port Island, Kobe, Japan, October 8-10, 1988).